DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 190 CS 509 126

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TITLE Student Perceptions of the Influence of Race on Professor Credibility.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 40p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Asociation (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Teachers; Case Studies; College Faculty; *Credibility; Higher Education; Qualitative Research; *Racial Bias; Self Concept; *Student Attitudes; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Student Surveys; Undergraduate Students; *Whites
IDENTIFIERS *Student Perceptions of Teacher

ABSTRACT

Education and communication researchers have not explored sufficiently teacher credibility or the classroom communication and experiences of teachers and professors of color, in particular, teachers and professors belonging to subordinate minority groups. As a result, there are gaps in the literature due to its incomplete status. Qualitative case studies of six professors, three Black and three White, are used to examine the relationship of race and student perceptions of credibility. The findings from interviews with 28 undergraduate students, enrolled in one of 6 courses, indicate that the classroom presents particular challenges for Black professors teaching at a predominantly White post-secondary institution. The findings from these student participants suggest that: (1) the Black professors are held to more stringent credibility standards than White professors; (2) that the challenges to credibility are exacerbated when Black professors teach subject matter that cannot be directly connected with their race; (3) that students possess favorable/fair attitudes toward Black professors once they have successfully established their credibility; and (4) that Black professors are perceived to have worked harder than White professors to earn their educational and professional status. (Contains 3 notes and 35 references; survey forms and questions are attached.) (Author/TB)

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Student Perceptions of the Influence of Race on Professor Credibility

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CS 509126

Paper presented in the International and Intercultural Division at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association (SCA) in San Antonio, TX in November 1995

Abstract

Education and communication researchers have not explored sufficiently teacher credibility or the classroom communication and experiences of teachers and professors of color - in particular, teachers and professors belonging to subordinate minority groups. As a result, there are gaps in the literature due to its incomplete status.

Qualitative case studies of six professors (three Black, three white) are used to examine the relationship of race and student perceptions of credibility. The findings from interviews with twenty-eight undergraduate students, enrolled in one of six courses, indicate the classroom presents particular challenges for Black professors teaching at a predominantly white post-secondary institution. The findings from these student participants indicate that: 1) Black professors are held to more stringent credibility standards than white professors, 2) the challenges to credibility are exacerbated when Black professors teach subject matter which cannot be directly connected with their race, 3) students possess favorable/fair attitudes towards Black professors once they have successfully established their credibility, and 4) Black professors are perceived to have worked harder than their white professors in order to earn their educational and professional status.

Introduction

Two of the major cognitive goals of an academic environment are: 1) the acquisition of knowledge, and 2) the ability to transfer knowledge learned in one context to new situations. Teacher communication can be viewed as the interface between knowing and teaching. Teachers serve as catalysts motivating students to achieve the cognitive and self-esteem goals associated with an academic environment and, according to Brophy (1979), teacher behavior can result in positive classroom outcomes.

According to Bassett and Smythe (1979) two factors influence a teacher's ability to affect the self-concepts of students: 1) credibility, and 2) self-esteem. Whereas self-esteem is personal and internal, "credibility does not reside in the teacher but rather in the minds of students" (p. 179). The credibility construct, when applied to teachers, has been defined by McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974) as consisting of five dimensions: character, sociability, composure, extroversion, and competence.

The communication discipline has devoted much attention to identifying speaker characteristics associated with credibility. These studies, however, have typically focused on public speaking or public figures with whom the audience possessed limited, if any, direct contact. Of 95 studies with the term "credibility" in the title, only five examined ways in which teachers established, maintained, and lost credibility, or the effect of teacher credibility on learning

(Beatty & Behnke, 1980; Beatty & Zahn, 1990; Frymier & Thompson, 1992; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974; and McGlone & Anderson, 1973). None of the five teacher credibility studies employed a qualitative method despite the complexity of the classroom as evidenced by educational research within Shulman's (1986) classroom ecology paradigm (see Endnote 1).

In addition to the absence of research exploring teacher credibility, education and communication researchers have overlooked the classroom experiences of teachers and professors of color. In particular, the experience of being a member of a subordinate minority (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) functioning as a professional within a predominantly white educational environment has escaped the interest of the white social scientist (Foster, 1990; Weinberg, 1977). Yet Black teachers and professors do exist (see Endnote 2).

Black teachers have contributed to the education of children and adolescents in the United States for two centuries. With the onset of desegregation, most Black teachers and principals were dismissed or demoted at the same time Black students were being enrolled in previously all-white schools (Coffin, 1980; Smith & Smith, 1973). An additional dimension of desegregation occurred in the 1970s in the Northern and Western areas of the United States and continues today. According to Banks (1986), parents in the Northern cities were often as violently opposed to desegregation as their Southern counterparts. White flight to the suburbs was another means of avoiding desegregation under the

guise of desiring neighborhood schools. At present, public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly non-white and poor, and 2) are segregating a disproportionate number of white students from the rest of the student body by assigning them to academically gifted courses.

At the collegiate level, prior to 1900, teaching positions for Blacks were confined to land grant colleges rather than privately supported institutions. Only two Blacks, besides Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, held teaching positions within predominantly white colleges prior to 1900 (Moss, 1958). According to the the United States Equal Opportunity Commission Report (Guess, 1989), 90% of the full-time faculty are white, whereas only 4.1% are Black. The number of Black professors has not increased over the past two decades.

Given the: 1) restricted interactions between Black teacher/professors and white students, 2) negative tenor of race relations within the United States (Guess, 1989; Frisby, 1994), and 3) continued expression of alienation by Black faculty (Cook, 1990; Lopez, 1991), it is logical to speculate that a classroom of predominantly white students may present particular challenges to building credibility and acceptance (and, thus, student learning and self-esteem) for the Black teacher and professor. This is particularly true when one considers the recipient ego-involvement research of Tucker (1971) and Wheeless (1974a, 1974b). According to these researchers, perceived source competence is the most consistent predictor of the selective exposure of receivers. If the basic competence of Black professors is questioned more

than that of white professors, a question naturally arises regarding parallel behavior on the part of highly prejudiced receivers. In other words, if highly ego-involved receivers are less likely to change attitudes and assign positive credibility ratings, can similar behavior be expected from highly prejudiced receivers?

Black teachers and professors are expected to motivate and cultivate student learning and self-esteem while also instilling a sense of appropriate and inappropriate behavior yet the classroom experiences of these educators have not been carefully analoged. In view of the gaps in the extant literature regarding the: 1) way teachers establish, maintain, and lose credibility, 2) classroom experience of Black teachers and professors, and 3) extensive reliance on quantitative research methods to identify and assess the impact of credibility, this researcher investigated the credibility (i.e., verbal cues, nonverbal cues, and perceptions) of Black and white professors teaching at a predominantly white post-secondary institution. Because teacher credibility resides in the minds of students, the focus of this study is on student perceptions of professor credibility. The research question addressed is:

> RQ: When the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class, what verbal and nonverbal communication do the students' view as leading to student perceptions of credibility?

This paper discusses the research methods used to investigate the aforenoted research question as well as: 1) reports

and discusses the results, and 2) provides concluding remarks regarding the subject area.

Research Methods

Research Site

Non-participant observation occurred in six undergraduate courses at a large four year research institution in the Northwest reflecting a predominantly white student enrollment. The university was selected as the site of the investigation because the percentage of Black faculty and Black student enrollment was consistently small - certainly, less than the percentage found in the general metropolitan population. The Fall 1993 student enrollment at this research institution was as follows: Native American Indian 1.1%, Black 3.2%, Hispanic 3.3%, Asian 16.1%, and White 76.3%. Thus, out of a student body of 34,000, only 3.2% (1,088) of the students were Black. Yet, according to the 1990 federal census records, 10.1% of the metropolitan area's residents were Black. Black faculty represented 1.5% (60) of the 3,986 faculty whereas white faculty represented 89.6% (3573).

Professor Participants

The participants in this study represented a "purposeful rather than random" sample (Miles & Huberman, p. 36). Six professors (two in phase one, four in phase two) were selected using the following criteria: 1) race, 2) gender, 3) age, 4) teaching experience, and 5) departmental affiliation. The goal was to obtain the

participation of male dyads reflecting professors who worked in the same division and possessed comparable years of teaching experience at the collegiate level. However, three of the professors would be Black and three, white. The criteria were developed to keep constant those variables which might otherwise account for differences (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) in perceived credibility (e.g., gender).

The three dyads represented the social sciences **(Professors Bryan and Wyatt)**; performing arts **(Professors Mearns and Kindred)**; and, an undergraduate professional program **(Professors Samuel and Stone)**. Professors Samuel and Stone - taught within a structured undergraduate professional program. The program admitted approximately 50 competitively-selected undergraduate students each year into a structured series of courses taught over a two year period. The professional program prepared students for immediate entrance into the job market and students moved through the curriculum sequence as a "class." The remaining professors taught undergraduate courses with enrollments ranging from 100 - 400.

Student Participants

A total of twenty-eight students enrolled in one of six courses under observation participated in this study. Data were gathered from nine students in phase one and nineteen students in phase two.

In phase one, on the third week of the quarter a "Professor Credibility Survey" (see Form 1) was disseminated in the classes taught by Professors Bryan and Wyatt. Student

volunteers (those providing identifying information allowing for follow-up contact) were separated by class standing (i.e., sophomore, junior, etc.), race, and major (in the same field as the professor or in another field). Student interviewees were then randomly selected from a volunteer pool within each category. In the second phase of data collection, the selection procedures were adapted due to the limited number of students who volunteered to make themselves available for in-person interviews (see Endnote 3). Student participants selected from the pool of volunteers can be summarized as follows:

Professor Bryan -		
Allan	White Male	Freshman
Carrie	Native American Female	Senior
Jay	Pacific Islander Male	Freshman
Marie	White Female	Junior
Steve	Black Male	Senior
Professor Wyatt -		
Antoinnette	Black Female	Sophomore
Bill	White Male	Junior
Mark	Black Male	Junior
Patricia	White Female	Junior
Professor Kindred -		
Martin	White Male	Freshman
John	White Male	Sophomore
Walter	White Male	Junior
Pete	Black Male	Junior
Kandy	White Female	Freshman
Brenda	White Female	Junior
Darlene	White Female	Senior
Professor Mearns -		
Carl	White Male	Freshman
Gary	White Male	Sophomore
Brent	White Male	Senior
Frances	Black Female	Freshman
Sabrina	White Female	Junior
Robin	White Female	Junior
Cantrel	White Female	Senior
Professor Samuel -		
Anthony	White Male	Senior
Harriet	Asian Female	Senior
Professor Stone -		

Nathan	White Male	Fifth Year
Kramer	White Male	Senior
Dorothy	White Female	Senior

Data Collection Procedures

Three different methods were utilized to address the research questions: 1) non-participant observation (Spradley, 1979; 1980), 2) semi-structured interviews (Ginsburg, Jacobs, & Lopez, in press) of students and professors, and 3) open-ended questionnaires. Findings were triangulated across these three methods (Erickson, 1986; Mathison, 1988).

Non-participant observation schedule In phase one, observations occurred on a daily basis during the first week of the quarter. Observations of one class period were also made during the second, third, fifth, seventh, and tenth weeks of the quarter. In the study's second phase, the communicative behavior of four professors and their interac- tion with students were noted during seven weeks in a ten week quarter. Two of the four professors taught at exactly the same time; therefore, daily observation was not feasible. The schedule was:

Weeks 1, 2, and 3	Daily observations every other class period
Weeks 4 or 5	Observation of two consecutive class periods
Weeks 6, 8, 10	One observation

Such observations served to: 1) generate questions for the student and professor participants, 2) validate between what professors (and students) said they did in class versus what communication the researcher witnessed, and 3)

provide the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the professors'(and, in some cases, some of the students') communicative behavior. The researcher was generally known only to the professors during the initial weeks of in-class observation. During the the third week of the quarter, when each class was addressed by the researcher (in order to solicit student interviewees), the researcher's status was disclosed.

Semi-structured student interviews. Student inter- views occurred several weeks after the distribution of an open-ended survey during classtime (see Form 1). Student interviews assessing the credibility of their professors were critical because the students were the target audience for the professors' efforts.

One interview was conducted with each of the twenty-eight student participants. Most interviews occurred during Weeks 6 and 7 in the quarter and typically lasted close to 60 minutes (see Appendix 1). Interviews were generally conducted in the researcher's office. When a student arrived, the person was greeted and left alone for several minutes to review the Student Consent Form. The time alone was also designed to give each student a glimpse of the researcher by seeing her space within the office, family photos, books, etc. as well as those of her officemates.

Professor credibility survey. The term "credibility" was first used during Week 3 when the researcher addressed each professor's class in order to explain the research pro- ject, distribute the Professor Credibility Survey document to each

student, and to persuade students to provide identifying information which would allow for follow-up appointments and interviews. In each case, the professor left the room.

Once at the front of the room, the researcher introduced herself and explained her objective of investigating how professors communicate to build, maintain, and even lose credibility. The researcher then explained that her triangulated design called for input from the herself, professors, and students. An overlay of page one of the survey was placed on the overhead and three options were discussed: 1) do not complete the survey, 2) complete only the demographic and open-ended questions while leaving Section B (name and phone number) blank, and 3) complete all sections of the survey including identifying information.

Data Analysis

In-class observations. Handwritten field notes were taken during each observation and the class session was also audio-recorded using a microcassette recorder. Over the course of the quarter, the researcher observed each professor's non-verbal communicative strategies including proximity, eye-contact, facial expression, clothing, and voice tone. Verbal strategies such as sharing personal stories, asking questions, use of humor, statements regarding classroom philosophy, etc. were also noted and coded (as well as the structure of the entire class period - including the day's lesson) to create a communicative profile.

The handwritten notes from each observation also accounted for the researcher's location, the physical loca-

tion of items (and some people) in the classroom, and student responses to each professor's communicative behavior. For instance, did students avail themselves of time allotted for questions? The analysis of classroom communication served as one source of questions for the student and professor interviews and assisted in understanding particular examples provided by students during their interviews.

Student interviews. Most of the student interviews were conducted in the researcher's office. Students were asked to comment upon their responses on the Professor Credibility Survey as well as additional questions. In the case of students and professors, the researcher listened to the participant responses and took handwritten notes while also audio-recording the interview. When analyzing the data from student interviews, the audio- recording was played while handwriting the student comments verbatim. The verbatim transcript was cross-checked against the written information, provided by the student, on the Professor Credibility Survey and the researcher's handwritten notes taken during the actual interview.

Each interview's transcription was reread with margi- nal and reflective researcher comments jotted in the left margin along with location of the comment on the audio-tape. Key phrases or words within the transcript were occasionally circled or underlined. Marginal comments included noted areas of similarity with other respondents - including professors. Matrices were then constructed to visually display the student's responses to a particular set of key questions and

the researcher's general impression of each interview. During the process of visually gridding participant responses, interviews were re-read or listened to in order to ensure that key points and depth were not lost during the process of reducing the data to fit in the matrix.

In sum, professor and student interviews were transcribed from audiotapes with the characteristics associated with credibility and the influence of race given particular attention. Who (gender, race, class) perceived what (Hymes, 1972) was transferred from narrative form into matrices in order to examine possible relationships.

Professor credibility survey. The researcher balanced the potential for providing socially desirable answers by contrasting the survey and interview responses of the interviewees with those provided by "volunteers" and "non-volunteers" enrolled in the same course. Every student survey was read and coded then re-read and coded again at another time in the quarter. Key words, themes, and perceived components of credibility associated with each survey question were noted across gender and race. Tallies of responses (e.g., yes, no, probably) were also compiled depending upon the nature of the survey question to which students responded.

Results

Race and Credibility

RQ: When the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class, what verbal and nonverbal communication do the students' view as leading to student perceptions of credibility?

This research question called for student-generated criteria for assessing credibility when the professor's race differed from that of the majority of the students enrolled in the course. The nature of the institutional enrollment patterns focused this question on students of the Black professors. However, all interviewees were asked how they would assess the credibility of a Black professor.

When providing answers to the RQ, the student interviewees provided answers which can be categorized as follows: 1) applying more stringent credibility standards to Black professors, 2) the combination of professor race and subject matter as a criterion for assessing professor credibility, 3) the presence of favorable/fair attitudes towards Black professors once credibility had been established, and 4) the belief that Black professors worked harder to earn their educational and professional status than white professors.

Applying more stringent credibility criteria to Black professors. The majority of the student interviewees (19) indicated that race alone would not automatically establish a professor's credibility in the classroom. Unlike **Patricia** who believed, if anything, she would rate Black professors higher on credibility scales because she hadn't had the exposure, most of these student interviewees indicated they would typically use the same standards when assessing the credibility of both Black and white professors and usually repeated the same criteria they had listed on the Professor Credibility Survey in response to question

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two - What does it mean to say a professor is credible?" For instance, **Carl** mentioned he based his assessment on the individual's educational background (as listed in the college catalog), classroom "presence," and knowledge while **Dorothy** said credibility assessment depended on "how they set it up. How I get a feel for what I need to do." However, one of the students, **Cantrel**, did note "I think the white male has an advantage over everybody else just because of our bias in the culture. For me, I'm more sensitive to whether it's a man or a woman..."

Although students stated they would not automatically favor one race over another some of their discourse revealed that Black professors had to work harder to establish their credibility. **Carrie** and **Mark** (both people of color) were very cognizant that the qualifications of Black professors were often questioned by white students enrolled in their courses. During their interviews, both students spoke of overheard comments and conversations in class as well as open challenges to the authority of Black professors during class lectures. And Professor Bryan's student, **Allan**, noted that he tried to "embrace differences" yet he also mentioned that given his homogeneous upbring, the physical appearance of his professors did have an impact. Allan was unable to clearly delineate whether the impact was a bias in favor of his professors of color or a bias in favor of those professors his same race.

In addition to scrutiny from white students, three Black interviewees noted their own critical review of Black

professors. Even though **Antoinnette** was Black, she revealed that she constantly fought the negative stereotypes (e.g., Blacks can't do math) she had learned from American society when making judgments about her Black professors. A second student, **Pete** said Black professors would not begin with an automatic advantage and, in fact, would be judged harder than his white professors. Pete indicated he had greater expectations of his Black professors and, as a result, would be more stringent in his evaluation of their capabilities and ability to meet his needs as a student. **Steve** expected both Black and white professors to be knowledgeable, however, he gave the judgments he made about the capabilities of Black professors greater weight. This decision was based upon the "tougher" time he perceived Black professors to have experienced while earning higher degrees in a Anglicized educational environment.

Thus, ironically, negative stereotypes about the intelligence and academic preparation of Black professors co-existed with a positive belief (predominantly with the students of color) that Blacks must be quite accomplished individuals to be employed as professors as they must work harder than whites to acheive professor status.

<u>The combination of professor race and subject matter as a criterion for assessing credibility</u>. **Antoinnette** spoke of, even as a Black person, struggling with not assigning negative stereotypes to Black professors teaching courses without an ethnic/racial component in them. The tendency to find credence in the comments of Black professors speaking

about Blacks or subjects typically connected with Blacks (e.g., crime) was also reflected in the comments of seven other students.

Student interviewees admitted they assigned more credibility to Blacks teaching "ethnic" courses or believed other students - in particular, whites - would do so. For example, three of **Professor Mearns'** students (**Cantrel**,**Gary**, and **Frances**) believed other students would perceive him differently if he were teaching a course with "classical" content only. As Cantrel talked, she stated the belief that for herself (and others),

> the more removed from cultural identity, the more you have to figure out the fit...[like fitting] a square peg into a round hole

Thus, Professor Mearns would have a more difficult time establishing his credibility if his Blackness could not be somehow linked with subject and attributed as providing him with a unique understanding of the subject.

Two other students indicated they personally would assign more credibility to a Black professor teaching English (**Brent**) or Ethnic Studies courses (**Sabrina**).
Brent explained he would judge all of his professors based on how "they handle themself in front of the class...whether they are well-versed in the subject matter and how they articulate [their points]." However, he went on to say a Black professor who was able to teach standard English, given the distinctions between Black dialects and standard English, would be given "an extra plus."

Sabrina indicated a white person teaching an ethnic studies course could be viewed as credible if s/he met her criteria of believability, truth, and experience. However, even a white person with experience living with particular minorities could only present a marginalized view - "they can only get so close" - versus obtaining the perspective of an actual member of the community. Sabrina went on to say, "I'd want a minority perspective...[but] I don't think I'd typify any other subject like that."

Finally, one of the Black student interviewees - **Pete** - introduced his expectations regarding white professors. Pete indicated he expected "more liberalism" from his professors depending upon their disciplinary area. Thus, he did not speak of assigning more credibility to professors of color teaching race-related courses, rather, he spoke of a different system of dividing curriculum. Pete believed professors teaching courses in the social sciences would likely be more liberal and well-rounded in their world outlook than those in the hard sciences or disciplinary areas such as math.

Favorable/Fair attitudes towards Black professors once credibility has been established. Students indicated a desire to be exposed to Black professors based on positive experiences with Black professors, the desire to rectify limited or no exposure to Blacks in the past, previous exposure to Blacks in general, and the desire to increase their comfort level (as Black students) at a predominantly white institution.

Gary said he usually would give anyone a "fair shake" based on their personality and knowlege and would begin to form judgments about a professor's credibility after the first week. Gary indicated Professor Mearns was his first Black professor and had "set a precedent" in his mind as he was definitely credible and a good teacher. The first exposure to a Black professor setting a precedent - a standard of expected performance - was also reflected in **Walter's** comments. Walter had been exposed to three Black professors during this community college education and noted that he realized, as we talked, that his criteria for assessing credibility were drawn from experiences with his Black female drama teacher. His criteria for judging credibility included: 1) believability (reliability of the lecture material, clear explanations, and an ability to answer questions) and 2) pproachability ("humanity").

As noted earlier, **Cantrel** indicated she had worked with Blacks and Asians but she had not experienced Blacks within her close inner-circle of friends. Cantrel openly admitted that she was concerned that her daughter did not mingle with people of color because she did not see her mother doing so. **Allan**, **Marie**, and **Patricia** (all white students like Cantrel) indicated a desire for exposure to a less homogeneous environment. One way of achieving this was to expose oneself to Black professors. **Professor Bryan** recognized the importance of his presence for the benefit of white students as well as students of color.

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A number of the student interviewees - **Gary**, **Brent**, **Robin**, **Martin**, **Walter**, and **Kramer** - had previous exposure to Blacks. The implication from the interviews is that they possess less bias against Blacks in general due to having Black friends and role models. **Brent** said his "Black friends [gave] a more understandable, straightforward answer [than his white friends]" when he has problems and, thus, he expected the same will be true of his Black professors in the way they handle their classes - they would be more easily understood. **Robin** said, "White professors I don't really think much of...they're common..." She went on to say she also understood that among Black people, including professors, "there are wonderful ones (pause), crappy ones (pause)...they're just people like everybody else." In other words, Robin believed she was capable of making fair assessments because undue negative or positive stereotypes were not applied to Blacks as she had been exposed to a range of personalities. The same was true of her counterparts Gary, Brent, Martin, Walter, and Kramer.

Martin, **Anthony**, **Kramer**, and **Robin** all indicated they would welcome a Black professor as they believed he would present a different world view. Both Black student interviewees, **Pete** and **Frances**, indicated being in the presence of Black professors increased their comfort level. These students represent 3.2% of the student body and stand out in obvious contrast to the number white students enrolled at this research institution. The comfort level of Black students in a predominantly white environment (and for new

Black professors in the same environment) were areas of acknowledged concern on the part of all three Black professor participants - **Professors Bryan, Mearns,** and **Samuel.**

The belief that Black professors work harder to earn their academic positions. In phase one, all five of the students of color believed Black professors had to work harder to earn their academic degrees and to become employed at predominantly white educational institutions. Black professors were believed to deserve more respect because they experienced a "tougher" time earning their position and must "work twice as hard." **Jay**, a freshman of Pacific Islander descent, said he did not give professors of any particular race an automatic advantage. However, he acknowledged that his professors are judged "not just by sight" but, rather, by "what [they've] been through," Jay indicated he perceived "colored" persons, like Professor Bryan, as being more aggressive in his studies in order to reach the same status as their white counterparts.

Pete agreed with his counterparts and, as a result, indicated he was usually very impressed when he met Black professors - especially given Pete's more stringent expectations of them. Two white students - **Brent** and **Robin** - also noted their belief that Black professors face many more academic and work place challenges than white professors. Robin, interestingly, combined race and age as a criterion for a professor's credibility. She believed older Black professors and older female professors to have "really been

ahead" of their time to become successful prior to the passage of fairly recent anti-discriminatory legislation.

Discussion

The findings associated with the research question are summarized here along with a discussion of: 1) phenomena reflected in recurring patterns of the data, 2) study limitations, and 3) reflections from an "outsider within."

Summary

Most of these students did not personally believe any professor had an automatic advantage in establishing credibility based on race yet they simultaneously discussed a different and, even more stringent, set of criteria for evaluating the credibility of their Black professors. When doing so, one of the students articulated her belief that there was a "cultural" or "societal" norm which would automatically favor the white, male professor before he even spoke.

Several of the students acknowledged that it may be more difficult for Black professors to establish their credibility in subject areas which were not linked to their race - e.g., Ethnic Studies vs. Electrical Engineering. Several noted even though they would use the same criteria for a Black and white professor teaching math and science, they believed their white counterparts would use more rigorous standards before assessing a Black professor as being credible.

Students typically seemed interested in Black professors because they were accustomed to Blacks (used to friends, role

models, or Black teachers/professors) or because they were tired of a homogeneous, white upbringing and desired exposure to differing world views.

Finally, students (especially students of color) acknowledged their belief that Black professors must work harder to achieve academically and perform successfully as professionals within Anglicized educational systems.

Overall, these student interviewees wanted their professors, Black or white, to be knowledgeable, experienced in their subject area, effective users of teaching techniques, and skilled demonstrators/deliverers of their subject matter content. Yet students, in general, desired more evidence of the exact nature of the academic and experiential credentials of their Black professors.

Recurring Phenomena

Researcher status and influence. Common experiences between the researcher and student interviewees were noted - specifically, being persons of color and/or women (see Appendix 2) - which made the interview process enjoyable and comfortable. The researcher's race and gender attracted most of the students to volunteer for the interview as well as the opportunity to share their thoughts regarding appropriate teaching pedagogy. Two white males (one in phase one, one in phase two) can best be described as "curious" rather than attracted to any of the researcher's characteristics or the research topic. One possible explanation of this phenomenon may be related to the perceived credibility of the researcher.

Few students of color volunteered (in phase two) to provide identifying information for follow-up interviews when participants were solicited during the fall term. The timing within the academic year may have influenced the willingness of students of color to volunteer -- for instance, incoming freshman and transfer students possibly being preoccupied with learning their new academic environment and professor expectations.

Student self-protection of identity. None of the student participants sat near, waved at, or approached the researcher before, during, or after the class. A student interviewee would occasionally smile, however, it was a ritualistic salutory greeting which they executed with others entering the class as well. When the researcher and the interviewee completed an interview and walked to a course designated for observation together, it was common for students to sit in a different location rather than sitting next to or in the same row as the researcher. Students protected their identity as study partici- pants from their classmates and professors and, nonverbally, communicated they expected the researcher to do so as well.

Study Limitations

The absence of interviews over time. Extra credit could not be offered to student participants as no other extra credit was offered by these professors; therefore, making it impossible to camouflage the activity. Given that students were not being compensated for their time, their time commitment to the study was minimized. The researcher

balanced the potential for providing socially desirable answers by contrasting the survey and interview responses of the interviewees with those provided by "volunteers" and "non-volunteers" enrolled in the same class.

The nature of the data collection site. This research was conducted in a geographic area in the United States where 10.1% of the population in the metropolitan area was Black whereas only 1.5% of the faculty and 3.2% of the student body were Black. The tolerance of racial differences and exposure to Blacks in one's community may vary in other geographic areas.

Reflections from an "Outsider Within"

The researcher approached this study from the particular vantage point of what Collins (1991) refers to as the "outsider within." The researcher is a Black female investigating cases in a predominantly white educational institution. Before concluding, a few reflections are noted here to provide a glimpse into the psyche of an "outsider within."

1. Most of the twenty-eight student interviewees were positively disposed towards the six professors in this study. The students viewed their professors as knowledgeable and, in most cases, as good teachers. However, it is important not to overlook the: a) continued self-concerns of these Black professors even after years of teaching, and b) recognition by the student interviewees that other white students do not readily accept Black professors and view them as credible. These student interviewees likely reflect a minority perspective rather than that of the majority --thus, it is critical to acknowledge and give credence to the Black professors' beliefs that generally white students (and some Black students) assess them according to a more stringent standard. The positive orientation of white student

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interviewees in this research is likely atypical of many whites in the classroom.

2. White confederates were not used to assist in the interview process. In my view, the use of white confederates denies: a) the commonplace of underlying racial tension in everyday interaction within the United States "settlement," (Lofland & Lofland, 1984), b) creates a second order, contrived reality, c) eliminates an opportunity for Black researchers to refine "disciplined subjectivity" in such a communicative event, and d) diminishes the importance of the reality associated with Black/white encounters. According to Allen, Heckel, & Garcia (1980), "...the journey outside the fishbowl for neophyte black researchers will be fraught with obstacles and pitfalls, for it is they who must chart an insightful course for those who will follow" (p.770).

3. Most of the student interviewees were attracted not only to the research topic (classroom communication and professor credibility), but to the researcher as well. Students came to participate in the study and to: a) commiserate with another woman they admired somewhat for her level of academic accomplishment, b) commiserate with another person of color within the oasis of her office, and c) seek advice about how to approach a Black classmate and/or make Black friends on campus. When the interview progressed to a discussion about the credibility of Black professors, some white students also chose to discuss their ideas about race relations, in general, noting that they appreciated the opportunity to talk out loud with someone. They apparently viewed the researcher as a "safe" person and her office as a non-threatening environment.

As a researcher, I was cognizant of the need to balance my roles and their corresponding responsibilities. It was necessary to anticipate what roles I would perform (researcher, person of color, confidant, advisor, etc.), what behavior each role entailed, and how the roles could be executed without sacrificing the integrity of the research. A parallel can easily be drawn between the multiple roles of

this Black female researching in a predominantly white academic environment and the three Black male professors teaching within the same environment -- even though the professors were male, we all functioned as "outsiders within" performing our requisite tasks and recognizing additional responsibilties and obligations as well.

Conclusion

Although many classroom studies have been conducted over the past 40 years assessing teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, few have investigated how teachers establish and maintain their credibility. In addition, education and communication literature is incomplete as the classroom perspective and pedagogical knowledge of Black professors and teachers has often been overlooked. Black teachers have been educating children and adolescents for over 200 years in the United States, yet their classroom experiences have been chronicled only to a limited degree. According to Rose (1966), universities reflect the ills of society rather than serving as agents for change. Therefore, it is likely that the classroom experiences of Black teachers and professors do not completely parallel those of their white counter- parts, yet they are expected to motivate and teach students as well as meet promotional requirements - (e.g., tenure).

Given the pivotal role of teachers and professors within the educational system and the disparate student perceptions and expectations of professors based upon race, as reflected in the findings of this study, it is imperative

that additional research be conducted. We must add to our body of knowledge by incorporating the educational experiences of teachers and professors of color and the perspectives and experiences of students. Such knowledge may increase the: 1) successful classroom and career experiences for professors of color, and 2) cognitive, behavioral, and affective development of students.

Endnotes

1. The credibility literature review spans the 80 year period from 1915-1994. These journals were reviewed Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, Central States Speech Journal, Communication Education, Communication Monographs, Communication Quarterly, Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Human Communication Research, Journal of Communication, Philosophy and Rhetoric, Southern Communication Journal, Quarterly Journal of Speech, and the Western Journal of SpeechCommunication.

2. "Black" is being used as a formal name designating nationality parallel to the term "African-American." The term "Black" is capitalized in recognition that, due to slavery, most Blacks cannot identify a specific tribe or nationality associated with an "old country" whereas it is more likely that whites can associate themselves with a particular nationality and/or ethnicity.

3. In phase one, 84 surveys were completed in Professor Bryan's class and of these 20 contained identifying information to allow contact for interviews. 219 completed surveys were returned in Professor Wyatt's class. Of the 219, 53 contained identifying information allowing contact for interviews.

   An adaptation of the selection procedure noted on page seven became necessary due to the limited number of students who volunteered to make themselves available for in-person interviews. In the large group instruction courses taught by Professors Mearns and Kindred, the response to the credibility survey was 79% and 45% respectively. However, only 16% (25) of the total respondents identified themselves in manner allowing selection for interviews in Mearns' course and 22% (17) in Kindred's. In the case of Professors Samuel and Stone, who taught courses with enrollments approximating 48 and 40, there was a 88% (42) and 60% (23) total return respectively. However, only 7% (3) of the total respondents identified themselves in a manner allowing for interviews in Samuel's course and 13% (3) in Stone's.

   Given the low percentages of students willing to participate in a one hour interview, the original selection procedures were adapted. All six students enrolled in the courses taught by Professors Samuel and Stone were automatically selected for interviews. It is also important to note that, given the structured program, most students enrolled in the courses taught by these two professors were juniors, seniors and, to a lesser degree, fifth-year students.

In **Professor Kindred's** course, three white males were selected from the freshman, sophomore, and junior respondents volunteering for interviews as well as the only two Black males willing to volunteer for an interview. Of the two Black males, only one actually scheduled an interview. Three white females were also selected, representing three of the four class levels - freshman, junior, and senior.

In the case of **Professor Mearns**, three white males and one Asian (the only person of color to provide identifying information allowing follow-up for an interview) were selected along with three white females and the only Black female to provide identifying information. Ultimately, the student of Asian descent did not show for his interview.

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FORM 1

Professor Credibility Survey

Section A _____

Gender (circle one) **Male** **Female**

Major: _____

Year in School (circle one) **Freshman** **Sophomore** **Junior** **Senior** **Other**

Race/Ethnicity (circle one) **Black/African American** **Pacific Islander** **Hispanic American**
White/Anglo American **American Indian** **Asian American**
International Student (specify country) _____

If you are willing to participate in a one hour interview with me regarding your impressions of this class and Professor _____, please complete BOTH Sections B and C.

Your name will NOT be used in my final report and Dr. —— will NOT know you spoke with me.

If you are NOT interested in the one hour interview leave Section B blank & complete Section C.

Section B _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Convenient Times to Call _____

Section C _____

Is Professor —— credible? Please discuss why or why not.

Please complete the reverse side

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Form 1 continued

Section C (continued) _____

What does it mean to say a professor is credible?

What other words are the same as or similar to "credible"?

What was your first impression of Professor ---- on the very first day of class? Why?

Thank you for assisting me with this research project.

October 1993

APPENDIX 1

Student Interview Questions

Review and sign the student consent form. Get approval to audiotape.

Review survey questions. Any changes from Week 3?

1. Is Professor _____ credible? Please discuss why or why not?
2. What does it mean to say a professor is credible?
3. What verbal and nonverbals cues does Professor _____ use to communicate credibility?
4. What other words are the same as or similar to "credible?"
5. What was your first impression of Professor _____ on the very first day of class?

Additional Questions:

1. What is your major at ---------- university??
2. Have you attended other postsecondary institutions?
3. Have you enrolled in _____ courses before?
4. Why are you taking _____?
5. What do you know about your _____ professor?
6. What traits do you believe good teachers possess? Is the same true of professors at the collegiate level?
7. Tell me about the verbal and nonverbal communication of the best professor/teacher you've had and the worst.
8. When there isn't anyone around to hand you a survey, do you normally make judgments about professors' credibility on the first day of classes?
9. Have you ever had any Black professors?
10. If you walk into two different classrooms and the professor in one class is Black and the other white, what standards do you use to judge their credibility? Does one have an automatic advantage over the other?
11. Do you think if another interviewer, a white interviewer were asking you these questions that your answers would be the same?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Debriefing begins...

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APPENDIX 2

Interviewer/Interviewee Empathy Demonstrated in the Talk

Interviewer and **Carrie**:

K: Now are they teaching>>...what subjects? Native American Studies or are they across disciplines?

C: Ummm they teach ummm a American Indian Studies (K: um hum). Which is a (unintelligible) North Western Indians whatever. And I had a dance class. It was a Indian dance class. (K: um hum) I had the carving class. (laughs)

K: Now< what was the last one?

C: Carving (pause) class.

K: Carving!

C: Carving. Yeah, Native American carving.

K: Um hum. Are you artistically inclined? This doesn't...this question isn't even on the sheet but I'm just curious.

C: No. (voice rises) I'm not>>. I just (laughs) wanted...(we both burst into laughter). I know how to dance, though (laughs).

Later in the interview:

K: I've got one more question for you. If you had a ...We're both people of color and what I' curious about is>>> (she makes affirming facial expressions and we both laugh) if you had a (I say, "Yeah"... "I'll be finished in just a sec.") ummm interviewer asking you these same questions about Dr.

Perhaps my lack of comfort is revealed by the length of time it takes to ask the question

and about race>, but the interviewer was white, do you think that would have affected ? your answer

[I must learn to be succinct.]

C: Yeah. (laughs) I think it would have. Cause the person would have said, "Well, what about race?" And I would have said (voice rises with an agitated tone), "Well, what about race?" (K: Um hum. hum - emphathetic sound) I'd say, "Well, why do you wanna know?" I think I'd be kinda

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(unintelligible). I think I'd just sit there and answer and not say nothin...Act like I'm dumb. (K: um hum) I wouldn't give em much (laughs) I don't know. (K: um hum - empathetic tone) Act dumb. (K: um hum) I wouldn't give em much information. (K: Okay) What are you trying to probe around for? (she is still posing questions for the white interviewer)

K: So you trust me.

C: Yeah. I trust you. (laughs) You're not someone that often would take us down. NO! (K: We both laugh and I say, "It would be kinda hard. It would take awhile.")